



Missouri governor granting pardons at pace not seen since WWII era

By DAVID A. LIEB
Associated Press

Distraught by a romantic breakup, 16-year-old Kenny Batson vented his hurt by stomping out the windshields of cars on a for-sale lot. He landed in juvenile detention, but that was only the beginning of his trouble.

Over the ensuing years, Batson stole cigarettes, booze and cars for drunken joyrides while bouncing in and out of prison and substance abuse treatment programs. At age 20, he beat a man nearly to death, stopping only when friends pulled him away. Now 50, Batson is a Christian pastor, a reformed man who has been pardoned for his crimes. The governor who pardoned him knows a bit about transformations.

For a dozen years as a rural sheriff, Mike Parson was the face of justice, the man ultimately responsible for catching and locking up local lawbreakers. Now governor, Parson also has become the face of mercy by pardoning more than 600 people in the past three years, more than any Missouri governor since the 1940s.

Continued on Page 2



Pastor Kenny Batson stands near a sign displaying the worship service times of Grace Fellowship Church on Nov. 16, 2023, in El Dorado Springs, Mo. Batson was convicted of a series of crimes in the 1990s but became a Christian pastor after being released from prison. He was pardoned by Missouri Gov. Mike Parson.

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Page 2



Page 9



Page 9

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Missouri governor granting pardons at pace not seen since WWII era

Continued from Front

"I still believe in law and order. I believe criminals need to be treated as such, and they've got accountability," Parson said in an interview with The Associated Press.

But "it doesn't mean they're a criminal all their life," Parson added. "I think you've got to be able to look at it."

Parson's pardoning pace in Republican-heavy Missouri coincides with a national movement to restore citizens' rights and reputations after they have served criminal sentences. Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, recently set a new state record for the number of pardons.

Minnesota also could be in store for more pardons after the Legislature this year revamped the state's clemency process to allow for pardons without unanimous votes by a three-person board composed of the governor, attorney general and chief justice. The governor still must be one of the two votes.

At the federal level, President Joe Biden last year pardoned thousands of people convicted of marijuana possession and encouraged governors to do the same.

The movement marks a step back from the tough-on-crime politics of the late 20th century and a return to an earlier American era when pardons and commutations were much more common.

Though the process varies,



Pastor Kenny Batson stands near a sign displaying the worship service times of Grace Fellowship Church on Nov. 16, 2023, in El Dorado Springs, Mo. Batson was convicted of a series of crimes in the 1990s but became a Christian pastor after being released from prison. He was pardoned by Missouri Gov. Mike Parson.

(AP Photo/David A. Lieb)

every state allows some form of clemency. Commutations shorten the length of sentences. Pardons function like official forgiveness for crimes, restoring rights such as the ability to own firearms and clearing hurdles for employment. For Batson, the pardon helped restore a sense of self-worth by obliterating the felon label. The official document arrived in a manilla envelope more than five years after his wife put together a thick packet of recommendation letters for his clemency application.

"I literally cried and screamed when I got it. It was amazing," Batson said. In Missouri, clemency requests are first screened by the Board of Probation and Parole, which makes confidential recommendations to the governor. There is no deadline for the governor

to make a decision. Parson inherited nearly 3,700 clemency applications when he was suddenly elevated from lieutenant governor following the resignation of scandal-plagued GOP Gov. Eric Greitens in June 2018. Some of those cases, including Batson's, dated to the tenure of Democratic Gov. Jay Nixon, who served from 2009-2017.

Parson's staff began systematically tackling the backlog in December 2020, even as more requests poured in.

They set a goal of evaluating around 100 cases each month, weighing applicants' work and education history, community involvement, character references and contrition for their crimes. The types of crimes, how young offenders were and how much time had

passed also came into play as Parson made his decisions.

So far, Parson has denied about 2,400 clemency requests while granting 613 pardons and 20 commutations.

That's the most since Republican Gov. Forrest Donnell granted almost 1,700 pardons from 1941-1945.

In Wisconsin, Evers has granted 1,111 pardons since taking office in 2019, surpassing the record of 943 set by Republican Gov. Julius Heil from 1939-1943. Evers' actions are particularly notable because his predecessor, Republican Gov. Scott Walker, had disbanded the pardons board and issued no pardons during his eight years in office.

As a result of Parson's actions, Missouri is now categorized by the Restoration of Rights Project as one of 16 states granting frequent or regular pardons. A predictable schedule, like Parson's monthly announcements, can help dispel impressions that the process is corrupt, said Margaret Love, executive director of the nonprofit Collateral Consequences Resource Center, which runs the project.

"The thing about regular pardoning is the public comes to have confidence in it, and they understand what the governor is doing," said Love, a former pardon attorney for the U.S. Justice Department.

In Wisconsin, Evers' pardon announcements have been accompanied by a brief summary of each

person's crimes and subsequent accomplishments.

Parson has publicized only the names of those granted clemency. But details of each person's criminal offenses and the dates and counties of their convictions are included in clemency documents filed with the secretary of state's office, which the AP obtained through open-records requests.

Of those granted clemency by Parson, 42% had been convicted of drug crimes, 28% of theft and 14% of burglary, according to an AP analysis. The next most common felony convictions were for driving while intoxicated, forgery and passing bad checks. On average, nearly 28 years had passed since their last convictions.

Two notable exceptions were Mark and Patricia McCloskey. The St. Louis couple who gained national attention for waving guns at racial injustice protesters were pardoned by Parson on July 30, 2021, just six weeks after Mark McCloskey pleaded guilty to misdemeanor fourth-degree assault and Patricia McCloskey pleaded guilty to misdemeanor harassment.

At least three people were pardoned for crimes committed in Polk County while Parson was sheriff there from 1993 to 2005. They include Pete Underdal, whose frequent drinking and driving landed him in prison, and Dave Galloway, who was caught selling methamphetamine from his home. □

Cleanup, air monitoring underway at Kentucky train derailment site

LIVINGSTON, Ky. (AP) — Kentucky officials and crews with rail operator CSX were working Friday to remove train cars and spilled material at the site of a derailment that sparked a chemical fire earlier in the week and prompted home evacuations in a nearby small town.

State officials said Friday they were monitoring the air for traces of hydrogen sulfide and sulfur dioxide, but there had been no detection of

those substances at the derailment site or the nearby town of Livingston since Thursday morning. The fire was extinguished at the site just after noon on Thursday. "We're now able to get in and begin safely removing cars," Joe McCann, director of emergency management and hazardous materials for CSX, said at a briefing Friday. McCann said an access road has been built to reach the derailment area and a

handful of crashed train cars have been removed.

The CSX train derailed around 2:30 p.m. Wednesday near Livingston, a remote town with about 200 people in Rockcastle County. Residents were encouraged to evacuate just a day before the Thanksgiving holiday.

Two of the 16 cars that derailed carried molten sulfur, which caught fire after the cars were breached. That

sulfur is now solidified, according to the state Energy and Environment Cabinet. The Cabinet also has a drone flying over the area Friday to collect information. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is also at the site.

McCann said Thursday that the company had provided hotel rooms to around 100 people and 40 pets. He said that if residents had concerns about returning

home after the fire was extinguished they could reach out to the company about extending those arrangements.

CSX said the cause of the derailment and what caused the sulfur to ignite are still under investigation. Officials said they are also monitoring water quality in the area but a nearby creek is dried up and doesn't have moving water. □

Woman believed to be girlfriend of suspect in Colorado property shooting is also arrested



A member of the Custer County Sheriff's Office works the scene of a shooting on Tuesday, Nov. 21, 2023, near Westcliffe, Colo. Authorities say they have captured the man accused of fatally shooting a few people over a years-long property dispute in rural Colorado. The Custer County Sheriff's Office announced Tuesday afternoon that Hanme K. Clark was arrested by New Mexico State police.

(Parker Seibold/The Gazette via AP)

DENVER (AP) — A woman believed to be the girlfriend of a man suspected of killing three people and wounding a fourth in a property dispute in rural Colorado is also being held in connection with the shooting.

The arrest of Nancy Rae Medina-Kochis, 50, in New Mexico was announced

Thursday by the Custer County Sheriff's Office in Colorado. It said she is suspected of being an accessory to a crime, pending the continued investigation into Monday's shooting, which killed Robert Geers, 63, his wife Beth Wade Geers, 73, and James Daulton, 58, near Westcliffe, Colorado, about 77 miles (124 kilome-

ters) southwest of Colorado Springs. Daulton's wife, Patty Daulton, was also wounded. According to court documents, their neighbor, Hanme Clark, yelled about trespassing and then started shooting while Robert Geers was talking to a surveyor. Clark was arrested on Tues-



First-responder vehicles remained Tuesday, Nov. 21, 2023, at the site of a fatal shooting near Westcliffe, Colo. A man was on the run Tuesday after police say he fatally shot three people and critically wounded a fourth over a years-long property dispute over the use of an easement on the suspect's property in rural Colorado, authorities said.

(Parker Seibold/The Gazette via AP)

day near Albuquerque, New Mexico, after about 25 hours on the run. Medina-Kochis was with him at the time and is believed to be his girlfriend, sheriff's office spokesperson Reggie Foster said Friday. A telephone message left for the 11th District Judicial District Attorney's office on whether prosecutors have filed charges against Clark or Medina-Kochis was not

immediately returned Friday.

It is not known if either Clark or Medina-Kochis have lawyers representing them. Other neighbors not involved in the shooting have accused Clark of harassing them, denying them court-ordered use of part of his property to access their property, and posting signs saying he was armed, court records said. □

Victims in Niagara Falls border bridge crash identified as Western New York couple

By The Associated Press
undefined

NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y. (AP) — The two people killed when their car crashed into a border checkpoint in Niagara Falls and exploded in a fiery wreck were identified Friday as a western New York husband and wife whose family owns a lumber business and several hardware stores in the Buffalo area.

The Niagara Falls Police Department named the couple as Kurt P. Villani and Monica Villani, both 53, of Grand Island, New York, a leafy Buffalo suburb close to the falls.

Online business records and the company website

indicate the victims' family owns Gui's Lumber and seven Ace Hardware locations in western New York, his family operating the business since the mid-1980s.

"We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all that extended prayers, condolences and well wishes," the families and the lumber company said in a joint statement released by the Erie County Sheriff's Office on Friday. "At this point, we are requesting privacy so we may begin the process of healing."

Authorities have not yet released details on what exactly led to the couple's crash Wednesday at the Rainbow Bridge, where

their car raced through an intersection, hit a low median and was launched through the air before slamming into a row of security booths and bursting into flames.

The wreck prompted widespread concern on both sides of the border, as video and images of what appeared to be the aftermath of an explosion began to circulate online and officials closed the bridge and three other crossings in the area. Authorities investigated for several hours before the FBI's Buffalo office said it found no signs the incident was a terror attack and turned the case over to local police as a traffic



Workers block the entrance to the Rainbow Bridge border crossing between the U.S. and Canada, Wednesday, Nov. 22, 2023, in Niagara Falls, Ontario, after a vehicle exploded at a checkpoint on the American side of the bridge.

(Carlos Osorio/The Canadian Press via AP)

investigation.

The Niagara Falls Police Department has said the investigation will take time to complete given the complexity of the crash. The agency issued a statement Friday that named

the victims but contained no other details.

"The City of Niagara Falls would like to extend our sincere condolences to the families as they deal with this tragedy," the statement read. □

Andrew Cuomo accused of sexual harassment by former aide in new legal filing

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — Former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is being sued by a former aide who says Cuomo sexually harassed her while he was still in office.

Cuomo's former executive assistant Brittany Comisso filed the case against the ex-governor in state Supreme Court in Albany on Wednesday. The filing, a three-page summons, came just before the expiration for lawsuits under the Adult Survivors Act, a special law which gave victims of sexual abuse a one-year window for claims that would otherwise be barred by time limits.

Comisso was one of at least 11 women who accused Cuomo of sexual misconduct, leading to his abrupt 2021 resignation in a #MeToo-era scandal that marked a severe fall from grace for the Democrat. He has denied the allegations.

Comisso's lawsuit alleges sexual harassment



FILE - Former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo speaks during a New York Hispanic Clergy Organization meeting, Thursday, March 17, 2022, in New York. Cuomo is being sued by a former aide over alleged sexual harassment while he was still in office. Cuomo's former executive assistant Brittany Comisso filed the case against the ex-governor in state Supreme Court in Albany on Wednesday, Nov. 22, 2023. The filing came just before the expiration for lawsuits under the Adult Survivors Act, a special law that suspended the statute of limitations on sexual assault suits for one year

(AP Photo/Seth Wenig, File)

and unwanted touching from Cuomo and said she was punished for reporting the incidents. The case seeks monetary damages.

Her allegations led to a criminal charge against Cuomo that was eventually dismissed last year at the request of a county

prosecutor who described her as credible but said he couldn't prove the case. Cuomo attorney Rita M. Glavin blasted the latest fil-

ing.

"Ms. Comisso's claims are provably false, which is why the Albany County District Attorney dismissed the case two years ago after a thorough investigation. Ms. Comisso's transparent attempt at a cash grab will fail. We look forward to seeing her in court," Glavin said in a statement.

The Adult Survivors Act has cleared the way for a wave of lawsuits against famous men accused of sexual misconduct, with a slew of cases coming in the final weeks before it was set to expire. Over the past year, it has led to more than 2,500 lawsuits, including cases against former President Donald Trump, hip hop mogul Sean "Diddy" Combs and comedian and actor Russell Brand.

The Associated Press doesn't identify people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they decide to tell their stories publicly, as Comisso has done in interviews. □

Bird flu still taking toll on industry as 1.35 million chickens are being killed on an Ohio egg farm

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

More than 1.3 million chickens are being slaughtered on an Ohio egg farm as the bird flu continues to take a toll on the industry.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture said all 1.35 million chickens on the farm in Ohio's Union County will be slaughtered to help limit the spread of the highly contagious virus after a case was confirmed in the flock this week.

The outbreak that began in early 2022 has been much less severe this year as fewer cases of the virus are being found among the wild birds that spread it. But there have still been 8.1 million birds killed this year to help control the spread of the disease and 5.8 million of those have come just this

month as several large egg farms have been struck. That includes 1.2 million birds at one Iowa egg farm and another 940,000 chick-

ens at one Minnesota egg farm that had to be killed. Egg farms tend to be much larger than turkey or chicken farms, sometimes with

millions of birds. That's a big part of why Iowa the nation's largest egg producing state has been hit the hardest in this outbreak with nearly 17.3 million birds killed. Ohio is also one of the top egg producing states but it has seen only 5.1 million birds killed because of bird flu.

This week, there have also been sizeable bird flu cases confirmed on farms in Minnesota, Maryland, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Georgia and California. But the biggest one of those cases was the Maryland chicken farm where 198,200 birds were killed.

In 2022, nearly 58 million birds were slaughtered as part of the outbreak. The highly contagious virus is spread easily by wild birds through droppings and na-



FILE - A hen stands next to an egg, Jan. 10, 2023, at a farm in Glenview, Ill. More than 1.3 million chickens are being slaughtered on an Ohio egg farm as the bird flu continues to take a toll on the industry. The outbreak that began in early 2022 has been much less severe this year as fewer cases of the virus are being found among the wild birds that spread it.

(AP Photo/Erin Hooley, File)

sal discharges.

Farmers are working hard to keep the virus from infecting their flocks by taking steps like requiring workers to shower and change clothes before entering barns, sanitizing trucks that enter a farm and investing in separate sets of tools for every barn. But the virus is difficult to keep out particularly along the main pathways for migrating birds who are headed south for the winter.

Officials say bird flu doesn't represent a significant health threat. Human cases are extremely rare and none of the infected birds are allowed into the nation's food supply. Properly cooking poultry and eggs to 165 degrees Fahrenheit (73.89 degrees Celsius) will also kill any viruses. □

Germany's leader vows to fix a spending crisis that's worsening gloom in the struggling economy

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP)

— German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Friday promised quick action to fix a budget crisis after a court decision blew a large hole in the almost-finished plan for next year and threatened to disrupt spending on efforts to fight climate change and cushion the impact of high energy prices caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "Some are asking whether the financial support from the federal government, which caps high energy prices, can keep flowing or must be paid back," he said in a video posted to X, formerly known as Twitter. "Those are 'justifiable questions.'"

Scholz said, however, that the government is "firm in our intention to modernize our country, so that in future, we have strong industry, good jobs and good pay when our economy is climate neutral." Scholz's reassurances come as the budget crisis threatens to exacerbate problems in the world's worst-performing major developed economy.



FILE - German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, left, and German Finance Minister Christian Lindner arrive for the debate about the budget 2023 at the parliament Bundestag in Berlin, Germany, on Nov. 22, 2022. Germany's economy shrank in recent months and business confidence is still in the dumps, according to figures released Friday, Nov. 24, 2023 while the government is struggling to overcome a budget crisis that threatens to exacerbate problems in what was already the world's worst-performing major developed economy. (AP Photo/Markus Schreiber, File)

my. Figures released Friday laid those issues bare. Europe's largest economy contracted 0.1% in the July-to-September quarter as inflation eroded people's willingness to spend, Germany's statistics office said. Germany is the only ma-

jor economy expected to shrink this year, according to the International Monetary Fund, which foresees a decline of 0.5%. Meanwhile, the closely watched Ifo institute survey of business optimism showed a tiny uptick to 87.3

for November from 86.9 in October but remained well below its July level, meaning business confidence is still in the dumps. The country's budget crisis raises the possibility of spending cuts next year, which economists say

would worsen the challenges facing the stagnating German economy. It's struggling to adapt to long-term challenges such as a shortage of skilled workers and the loss of cheap natural gas from Russia after the invasion of Ukraine.

A court ruled last week that previous spending violated constitutional limits on deficits, forcing Scholz's government to put off a final vote on next year's spending plan and search for ways to fill a 60 billion euro (\$65 billion) budget hole over this year and next.

The country's Constitutional Court ruled that the government could not repurpose unused funding meant to ease the impact of COVID-19 into projects to fight climate change and offer relief to consumers and businesses hit with high energy costs.

The court said the move violated rules in the constitution that limit new borrowing to 0.35% of annual economic output. The government can go beyond that if there's an emergency it didn't create, such as the pandemic. □

Vietnam's plan for spending \$15.5 billion for its clean energy transition to be announced at COP28

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL
Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — A plan for how Vietnam will

spend \$15.5 billion to transition to cleaner energy has been finalized and will be announced at the COP28

climate conference, which begins in Dubai next week. Mark George, the climate counselor for the British Embassy in Hanoi, said that after months of coordination with key Vietnamese ministries to iron out details of how the money will be used, the final plan was finalized on Thursday. George gave no details of the plan.

The United Kingdom is co-chair of a group of nine, rich industrialized nations that have agreed to provide the \$15.5 billion to help Vietnam end its reliance on dirty coal power and more quickly switch to renewable energy as a part of a Just Energy Transition Part-

nership, or JETP.

"That is a really important milestone," said George. George was speaking at a panel discussion hosted by the UK-Vietnam Joint Economic and Trade Committee centered around opportunities for the two nations after Britain officially joined an Asia-Pacific trade group that includes Japan and 10 other nations.

Earlier this year, Vietnam released a national energy plan that aimed to more than double the maximum power Vietnam can generate to some 150 gigawatts by 2030.

It called for a drastic shift away from heavily polluting coal and pledges that no

new coal-fired plants will be built after 2030. It also called for expanding use of domestic gas and imported liquefied natural gas or LNG, which will account for about 25% of total generating capacity, while hydropower, wind, solar, and other renewable sources will account for nearly 50% by 2030.

Tang The Hung, the deputy director general of Vietnam's department of Energy Efficiency and Sustainable Development, who also was at Friday's panel, said "great support" from the international community was needed to ensure Vietnam can carry out its plan. □



FILE - Workers are seen in Ninh Binh Power Plant, which is a coal fired power plant to supply electricity, in Ninh Binh Province in Vietnam, on Sept. 19, 2007. A plan for how Vietnam will spend \$15.5 billion to transition to cleaner energy has been finalized and will be announced at the COP28 climate conference, which begins in Dubai next week.

(AP Photo/Chitose Suzuki, File)

Diplomats from South Korea, Japan and China will meet about resuming a trilateral leaders' summit

By HYUNG-JIN KIM

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)

— The top diplomats from South Korea, Japan and China are to gather in South Korea over the weekend to discuss resuming their leaders' summit, Seoul's Foreign Ministry said Friday.

An annual trilateral meeting among the leaders of the three Northeast Asian nations hasn't been held since 2019 due to the COVID-19 outbreak and the often touchy ties among them. The three-way summit began in 2008.

While the three nations are close economic and cultural partners with one another, their relationships have suffered on-and-off setbacks due to a mix of issues such as Japan's wartime atrocities, the U.S.-China rivalry and North Korea's nuclear program.

The foreign ministers of the three countries are to meet in the southeastern South Korean city of Busan on Sunday to prepare for their leaders' summit and exchange views on ways to strengthen three-way cooperation and other regional and international issues, Seoul's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

The three ministers are to hold bilateral meetings on



FILE - South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin speaks during ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference with South Korea at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia, on July 13, 2023. The foreign ministers of the Japan, South Korea and China are to meet Sunday, Nov. 26, in Busan, Seoul's Foreign Ministry said in a statement Friday, Nov. 24.

(Bay Ismoyo/Pool Photo via AP, File)

the sidelines as well.

In September, senior officials of the three nations agreed to restart the trilateral summit "at the earliest convenient time."

South Korea and Japan are key United States allies in the region and they host about 80,000 American troops on their soils combined. Their recent push to bolster a trilateral Seoul-Tokyo-Washington security partnership triggered rebukes from Bei-

jing, which is extremely sensitive to any moves it sees as trying to hold China back. When North Korea launched its first military spy satellite into space Tuesday night, Seoul, Tokyo and Washington spoke with one voice in strongly condemning the launch. They said the launch involved the North's efforts to improve its missile technology as well as establish a space-based surveillance system. But

China, the North's major ally, asked all concerned nations to keep calm and exercise restraints, echoing statements that it previously issued when North Korea inflamed tensions with major weapons tests.

United Nations Security Council resolutions prohibit any satellite liftoffs by North Korea, viewing them as covers for testing its long-range missile technology. The North says it has a sov-

ereign right to launch satellites.

Ties between Seoul and Tokyo soured badly in recent years due to issues stemming from Japan's 1910-1945 colonization of the Korean Peninsula. But bilateral relations have improved significantly recently as South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol pushes to move beyond history disputes and bolster cooperation to better deal with North Korea's nuclear threats and other issues.

But in a reminder of their complicated relations, a Seoul court this week ordered Japan to financially compensate Koreans forced into sexual slavery for Japanese troops during the colonial period. Japan called the ruling "absolutely unacceptable," arguing that it violated the international law and bilateral agreements.

Japan and China have also long tussled over Japanese WWII atrocities and the East China Sea islands claimed by both. Recently, the two nations became embroiled in a trade dispute after China banned seafood imports from Japan in protest of its discharge of treated radioactive wastewater from its tsunami-hit nuclear power plant. □



Wounded Palestinians lie in Shifa Hospital in Gaza City on Friday, Nov. 24, 2023, as the temporary ceasefire between Israel and Hamas took effect.

(AP Photo/Mohammed Hajjar)

RAFAH, Egypt (AP) — The Israeli government said Friday it would summon the Belgian and Spanish ambassadors following remarks by Spanish Prime

Minister Pedro Sánchez and his Belgian counterpart Alexander de Croo on the war between Israel and Hamas.

The announcement came

Israel summons Spanish, Belgian ambassadors following criticism during visit to Rafah

after the two leaders criticized Israel for the suffering of Palestinian civilians under Israeli military operations in Gaza. Sánchez also called for European Union recognition of a Palestinian state, saying Spain might do so on its own.

Speaking at a joint press conference on the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing with Gaza on Friday, Sánchez said the time had come for the international community and the European Union to once and for all recognize a Palestinian state. He said it would be better if the EU did it together, "but if this is

not the case ... Spain will take their own decisions."

Sánchez was speaking at the end of a two-day visit to Israel, the Palestinian territories and Egypt with de Croo. Spain currently holds the EU's rotational presidency and Belgium takes over in January.

"I also reiterate Israel's right to defend itself but it must do so within the parameters and limits imposed by international humanitarian law and this is not the case," Sánchez said. "The indiscriminate killing of civilians, including thousands of boys and girls, are completely unacceptable."

De Croo did not comment on recognition of a Palestinian state, but said, "first things first, let's stop the violence. Let's liberate the hostages. Let's get the aid inside ... the first priority is help people who are suffering."

De Croo stressed the need and hope for a permanent cease-fire, adding that this "needs to be built together. And it can only be built together if both parties understand that the solution to this conflict is never going to be violence. A solution to this conflict is that people sit around the table." □

The Hilton Aruba Caribbean resort & Casino Recognizes 310 Years of Experience



(Oranjestad)—The famed resort on Palm Beach celebrated work anniversaries this weekend, with 30 and 35 years of service, recognizing nine team members, at an elegant party in the Morris Lapidus Grand Ballroom.

Glenn Farro, Director of the HR department at the resort, who inaugurated the festivities, shared insights after his 37-year tenure with the resort. He reflected on the significance of dedicating 30, or 35 years to the hotel industry, highlighting the sacrifices made, working on weekends, nights, and holidays while the rest of the world celebrates. He also expressed his total admiration for the level of commitment these team members have made throughout their tenure and continue to make each and every day.

"Thirty-five years ago," said General Manager Larry Tuck, "gets me back to 1988, the year I started my career in the hotel industry in Canada. It brings back fond memories and highlights the passion demonstrated by the people in the hospitality industry, towards their guests and their hotel properties." He concluded his address by warmly congratulating the long-term careers of his hotel's team members.

Valeria Nowotny Vice President of Operations - Resorts, Luxury and Lifestyle Hotels for the Caribbean, Mexico and Central America at Hilton, in a pre-recorded video message, congratulated celebrants on their career landmarks on behalf of the Mexico, Caribbean and Central America division of Hilton.

The culinary team served a delicious menu inspired by the season, pumpkin soup with curry cream, grilled garlic shrimp and filet mignon, on a bed of pureed sweet potato, with baked Alaska for dessert.

As history recalls, the Aruba Caribbean closed in 1984, in need of

renovations. Then a new partnership with the Golden Tulip was hatched and in November 1986, the first part of the reopening took place, followed by the Caribbean Wing, 176 rooms, the Garden Wing, 80 rooms, and the Barbizon wing, 120 rooms, plus 30 cabanas.

While the economy was suffering due to the closure of the refinery at the eve of Status Aparte, two years earlier, the hotel was continuously hiring staffers, for the Fandango nightclub, The French Room, and the Gazebo restaurant

In the following years the Grande Dame of Palm Beach enjoyed a successful run as the Golden Tulip, then again it was blessed by a change of ownership around the millennium, reflagged as a Radisson and finally in July 2015, went full circle, returned to its Aruba roots when it was picked up by the Aruba Growth Fund, becoming the upscale Hilton

Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino, with 357 charming guest rooms and suites, at the edge of an unmatched beach, nestled in enchanting gardens.

As team members' names appeared on the big-screen with their original file photos, from their old work-books, the room erupted with thunderous applause and laughter.

Recognition certificates and monetary gifts were presented to: Steve Lynch, 30 years, hired September 4th 1993; Cecilia Ras, 35 years, hired October 5th, 1988; Norma Lacle, 35 years, hired September 7th, 1988; Lilianna Tromp, 35 years, hired November 1988; Jacqueline Boasman, 35 years, hired July 20th, 1988; Ligia Lacle, 35 years, hired May 21st, 1988; Matilda Clement, 35 years, hired October 12th, 1988; Orlando Werleman, 35 years, hired December 23rd, 1988 and Ligia Panneflek, 35 years, hired August 10th, 1988. □



The Aruba Tourism Authority honors loyal visitors at Divi Dutch Village!

The Aruba Tourism Authority recently had the great pleasure of recognizing Emerald Ambassadors of Aruba. These Ambassadors were respectively honored with a certificate acknowledging their years of visits, loyalty, and love for the island of Aruba.

The honor certification is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation and to say "Masha Danki" to guests who have visited Aruba 10, 20, or 35 years or more consecutively.

The three honoring levels are as follows:

Distinguished Visitor (10+ years consecutively visiting Aruba)
Goodwill Ambassador (20+ years consecutively visiting Aruba)
Emerald Ambassador (35+ years consecutively visiting Aruba)



The honorees were:

Emerald Ambassadors
Mr. Charles & Mrs. Paulette Hill from Connecticut, United States.
Ms. Kimberley Richardson representing the Aruba Tourism Authority, and staff members of

the Divi Dutch Village bestowed the Emerald Ambassador certificate to the honorees, presented them with gifts, and also thanked them for choosing Aruba as their favorite vacation destination, as their home away from home.

Top reasons for returning to Aruba, provided by the honorees were:

- "We can relax!"
- Aruba's warm sun.
- Aruba's nice sandy beaches.
- Aruba's cleanliness.
- Aruba's friendly people.

On behalf of the Aruba Tourism Authority, we would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the honorees for their continued visits to the "One Happy Island". □

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The Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins and its history

(Oranjestad)—The Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins is one of the most visited places by tourists on the island, as it lies along the northern coast line near the mini pool and on the way to the Natural Bridge. Despite its seemingly plain appearance, this ruin represents one of the most important histories of the island: The Aruban Gold Rush.

Built in 1872 by English company Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd, the gold mill at Bushiribana was constructed in the area where most gold was found by locals. The story of gold on Aruba actually dates back to 1725, when a first exploration for gold on the island was commissioned by the Dutch West



India Company. Under the leadership of Mr. Paulus Printz, a three-year search was conducted on Aruba, to no avail. Though they found some gold, it was enough to motivate a further search, and the assignment was discontinued by Printz himself.

It wasn't until 100 years later, in 1824, when a young boy found a lump of gold while out herding his father's sheep. His father took it to a local merchant who then sold the lump for \$70. Unbeknownst to the boy and his father, they quite

literally struck gold, and as word got out, a gold fever spread among the locals who started searching for more gold. About 25 pounds worth was found.

At the same time, the Aruban government took immediate actions, and informed Curacao that gold was found. At first, everyone could look for gold, as long as they sold it to the government. However, after some time, the government decided to implement stricter rules and banned local search parties.

Over the years, concession-holding had seen different companies from around the world, all of which used primitive methods to dig

and carve out gold from the rocks. Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd. was no different, but used a unique method that involved grinding the rocks and letting the dust be blown away by the strong northeast wind, leaving clumps of gold behind. The next step was melting the gold and letting it attach to quicksilver in order to obtain pure gold. All these processes were done at the Bushiribana Gold Mill.

The gold mill itself had a short life-span: only 10 years in service, but its structure remained relatively solid till this day, and is now a historical remnant.□

Sources: Etnia Nativia & gold-mineranch.com.

Aruban legends: Frenchman's Pass

(Oranjestad)—If you ever plan on taking a group tour of the island, you may pass through the Frenchman's Pass in Balashi. The Frenchman's pass (known to locals as "Franse Pas") remains a mysterious—and spooky—road of which its legend is told from generation to generation.

The history of the Frenchman's pass—and how it got its name—dates back to the colonization era, when the French tried to colonize the island, but were met with an angry mob of indigenous settlers, refusing to give up their land. However, as the French were heavily equipped with fire

arms, the indigenous settlers began to retreat, and hid away in nearby caves. The French colonizers tried to smoke them out of the caves, but the indigenous settlers ended up inhaling too much smoke and most died in those caves. From then on, this passage was known as Frenchman's Pass, and there have been many accounts of spirits roaming the area of Spanish Lagoon.

There are many ghost stories surrounding this area, but one of the most famous one involves a lonely hitchhiker, trying to find a ride back home in the dark rainy night.

Sometime after trying to hitchhike, the man saw a car approaching, appearing almost ghost-like in the rain. However, since he needed a ride real bad, he didn't think twice and jumped in. But to his horror, he noticed that there was no driver in the front. Paralyzed with fear, he didn't dare to get out, and the car started to move.

When approaching a sharp turn, the hitchhiker braced for impact, but just when he thought the car might drive straight off the road and crash, he saw a hand appear out the window and turn the wheel.



For the next few turns, the hand appeared again. After having had enough, the man decided to jump out and he ran to Santa Cruz.

Arriving at a nearby bar, he ordered a drink and began to tell everyone about his experience. Everyone grew quiet, because they realized he wasn't some drunk messing around; he was telling the truth.

Sometime later, two men walked into the bar and one of them noticed the

hitchhiker. He called out to his buddy and said: "Look, there's the idiot who sat in our car when we were pushing it!"

French man's pass is one of the few sites on the island that keeps the locals on their toes. While most ghost stories may not have real grounds—or some may even be a set up story for a joke, this pass contributes a lot to our culture of folkloric story-telling.

Source: visitaruba.com

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Visit the island's hidden natural pools

(Oranjestad)—Amongst the countless beaches surrounding the island that are well-known and frequently visited, there are an additional two "hidden" natural pools that are situated in the northern coast of the island, two ideal stops in your tour itinerary.

Conchi (Natural Pool)

For many years, Conchi was the only natural pool that we had on the island. Located in the Arikok National Park, near Boca Keto and the Daimari Ranch, Conchi—also known "Cura di Turtuga (Turtle's Cove) or just Natural Pool—is reachable with any 4x4 vehicle or by foot if you're up for a long hike. However, since it is part of the National Park, you must first get permission from park management to

enter. You would have to purchase a day pass, and receive a wristband as proof of payment. Once you've completed that, you are set!

If you decide to hike from the entrance of the Arikok National Park, this is also possible: do bring plenty of protective clothing and enough water and food—it could take you up to three hours to hike there!

However, when you eventually do get there, you will be greeted with crystal blue water surrounded by a natural rock formation that protects you from the wild waves on the other side. Though the pool is located on the northern side of the island (where the sea is largely rough and largely

no suitable for swimming), the pool itself is very calm. It's also relatively deep, and you can climb up the rocks and jump in!

Cave Pool

This relatively new pool appeared just a few years ago, when a part of the dried up coral floor broke off and created a partition between the ocean and what is now the natural pool that is hidden there. Because it's still so new, there is no official name for it, but most people just call it the cave pool.

Just like the Conchi, the new natural pool is situated on the northern coast of Aruba. However, this pool is much easier to reach with any type of vehicle, and there is no hiking needed.



This spot has also become a regular stop for touring visitors.

When you get there, maybe you won't be able to spot the pool immediately, because you will probably notice the moon-shaped lagoon where wild northern waves crash into each other. Sounds scary, but if you look down on your right, you'll see a calm, crystal blue little pool in the corner. To get there, you have to climb down some stairs. Be careful when climbing down and follow the instructions of your tour guide if you have one.

And just like Conchi, this pool also has a jumping spot, and a rope to climb back up the boulder.□

Picture of cave pool is credited to RockaBeach Tours

Visit the historic museum at Fort Zoutman!

(Oranjestad)—Located in the middle of downtown Oranjestad, situated right next to the government building "Cocolishi", is one of the oldest buildings of Aruba: Fort Zoutman. First constructed in 1796, this site has been used (or left unused) in many ways and

have survived eras of war and attempted dismantling.

When anyone refers to Fort Zoutman, they are actually referring to two separate buildings that, over the years, have been merged: the fort and the tower.



That's right, the iconic 5-story, squared tower was not part of the original structure of the fort, and is actually called "Willem III Toren". Constructed in 1867, this tower was named after the then-reigning king of The Netherlands, Willem III. Willem III Toren was originally a light tower, but after a request from Lieutenant Governor Jan Helenus in 1866, it also became a bell tower. The fort itself was originally constructed to protect the commerce bay of Paardenbaai from pirates and other disreputable characters roaming the Caribbean Sea. Unlike the Willem III Toren, Fort Zout-

man had a more tumultuous past, including the on-and-off reception of unwanted members of the English military several times (The Netherlands was at constant war with England back in the colonial era). Over the years, both the fort and the tower had functioned as different government center points, including a tax and stamps office. For some time these two buildings also housed a police precinct and jail, and even experienced abandonment until the Cultural Center Aruba Foundation (CCA) petitioned for its renovation in 1964, turning the site into the Historic Mu-

seum it currently is. Despite its small size, The Historic Museum guards a rich depository of the commercial, military and social history of Oranjestad, offering a glance into how the social culture of the town came to be. If you are interested in history and want to learn more about Aruba, then Fort Zoutman should definitely be included into your itinerary.

The museum is open Monday to Friday from 9am-6pm, and Saturday from 10am-2pm.□

Source: The Old Fort of Aruba by Jan Hartog.

Episode LXXVII -77 The Boa: an Invader

ORANJESTAD — The rapid adaptability of some introduced animal species that later became invasive on our continent has devastated great part of the original ecosystem and the new surrounding environments in which they found themselves.

Since the years of discovery when pets and domestic animals that went astray and survived, created a very negative impact if procreated and became successful. Traditional medicine, Ivory trade and the lucrative illegal business in exotic animals has devastating consequences. It is menacing to overturn decades of conservation gains in illegal wildlife

trade, threatening to overturn decades of conservation gains.

The Boa

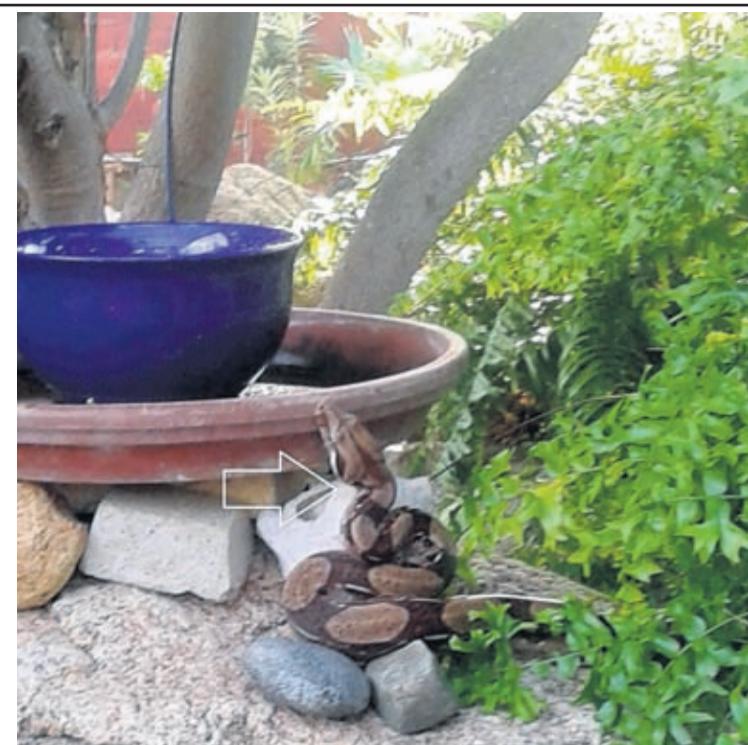
Representatives of the Boa family are found from northern Mexico, some Caribbean islands till Argentina. Of all the boas, constrictors can live in the greatest variety of habitats ranging from sea level to moderate elevation, including deserts, wet tropical forests, open savannas and cultivated fields. They are both terrestrial and arboreal.

Though common belief often imagine boa constrictors living in jungles, their habitats are actually much more diverse. When rainforests is their habitat, they

mostly thrive at the edges of open spaces. They thrive in dry tropical deserts and semi-deserts, woodlands, scrub and farmlands.

Boa constrictors are not generally considered intentionally aggressive or vicious pets. The snake as pet is more or less indifferent to their owners. They are not considered significantly capable of showing any type of affection as mammals such as dogs and cats do.

Boa constrictors strike when they perceive a threat. Their bite can be painful, especially from large snakes, but is rarely dangerous to humans. Specimens from Central America are more



irascible, hissing loudly and striking repeatedly when disturbed, while those from South America tame down more readily.

Aruba's native bird species are under an alarming tread by the boa that came to our island about 20 years ago as a pet or maybe as a stowaway on an air plane or a ship etc. The first boa was discovered in 1999. Depending on its size, a mother boa can give birth to 30-50 live baby snakes at a time. With no natural predators on the island, the population has exploded dramatically in a very short time.

The bulk of their diet consists also of rodents, lizards and mammals as large as a big domestic cat has been reported to have been consumed. Young boa constrictors eat small mice, birds, bats, lizards, and amphibians.

Juvenile Boa constrictors feeds once a week, adults approximately every two weeks. Boas only hunt when hungry and fast during shedding or illness. Boas that has not eaten for three weeks can still be perfectly fine and fit.

To get to know more regarding Aruba's and its origins, its animals culture etc. we highly recommend you to book your participation. Living our cultural encounter session is mind opening and entertaining curious hearts for decades. Mail us at etnianativa03@gmail.com.

Our facilities and activities take place close to your place.□



Short history of the beginnings of baseball in Aruba

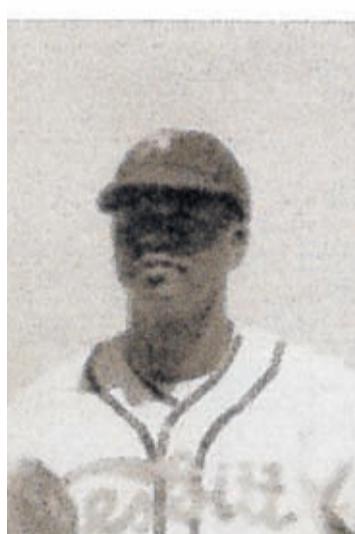
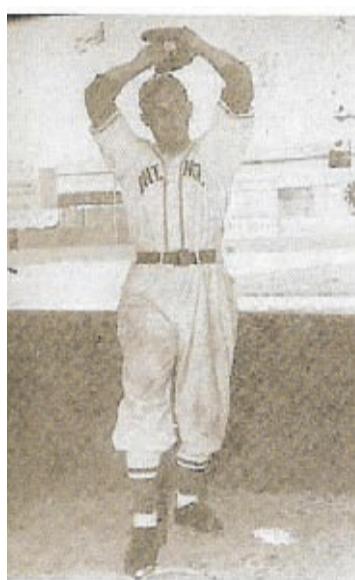
ORANJESTAD — Baseball was played on the island of Aruba in the 1930's, but only by United States expatriates working for LAGO and living inside the LAGO colony. Jim Bluejacket, the legendary US Indian who had played in two major league teams, worked for LAGO during 14 years and was a key factor in the growth of the popularity of the game in the colony. There is no record of Bluejacket ever playing outside the colony.

Outside the colony, the game of baseball was introduced to Aruba by Venezuelan immigrants and sailors on the Venezuelan fishing boats that used Aruba as their home port. They formed pick-up teams and played games on Sundays on an open field behind what is now the Court of Justice. One of the Venezuelans that comes to mind is Felix Garrido, grandfather of our current Prime-Minister.

In the late 30s the leader of this group was Raúl Aparicio, a cousin of Luis Aparicio who is now enshrined in the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. The Aparicos were evidently very good at sports. Raúl had two brothers who also played baseball, René and Roman. Rosendo, his only brother who did not play baseball became a professional soccer player in the Venezuelan league. Rosendo was nicknamed "Cabeza de oro" (golden head) for a memorable header he scored to win a game for his team.

Interestingly, it was in Aruba that Luis Aparicio played his first game outside of Venezuela. This took place in 1950 when he played shortstop for the school he attended. Later he played for "Cabezas" in a doubleheader of the Venezuelan Western League. These official games of the league were authorized to be played in Aruba by the Professional Baseball Organization of Venezuela. Several others who played in those games have also been enshrined.

Luis Aparicio's father was



the super popular Luis "El Grande" (the great one) after whom the baseball stadium in Maracaibo is named. He and his brother owned the professional baseball teams "Gavilanes" which later became the "Aguilas", and the "Cabimas".

In the early '40s, another group, mostly immigrants from the Dominican Republic also became very active with pickup teams. Some of these remained active in baseball well into the early '50s; as umpires, managers even as players. Among these were Nestor "Pantin" Guerrero who also had a musical band. Perhaps not so coincidentally, many of Pantin's players were also musicians. Luthai Pantophlet who umpired many years was a well-known drummer. Gaston Hazel was a bongo player; José Bryson and the brothers Nicholson, Teddy and Julio, all played several instruments.

In San Nicolas, baseball was played on the grounds next to where the LAGO Sport Park (now Laveist Sport Park) was officially inaugurated in March 1941.

During the WWII years, baseball got a big lift from the influx of Puerto Rican and US soldiers stationed here. As LAGO was playing a very important role in the struggle against Hitler, it was able to get all the sports equipment needed here to allow more people to participate.

In the '40s only the Lago Sports Park organized baseball championship games. The first teams to participate were Artraco, (Aruba Trading Co.), Esso Garage and Botica San Lucas. In 1945 Venezuelan employees of the Lago refinery participated under the name of "Cafenol", a very popular Venezuelan coffee brand. Two other groups of Venezuelan immigrants formed the teams "Cerveceria" (named after the iconic team Cerveceria Caracas), and "Venezuela", although not all members of these teams were Venezuelans. This was also the year that the team



sponsored by Roxy Café started to play as "Dodgers". Dodgers became the dominant baseball powerhouse till the 1950s.

Other teams that entered the baseball scene in the late 1940s: Pepsi Cola (Oranjestad) and St. Thomas Boys (former students of St. Thomas College, Oranjestad). "Baby Ruth" in San Nicolas played initially under the name "Camel" and "Barnes' Ramblers" the only team consisting of Lago Colony players to participate in the Lago Sport Park championships. "Red Rock Cola" was formed in Oranjestad in 1950. In 1952 the team Pepsi Cola became "Nesbitt's" and had players of seven countries, including two American expats from Lago Colony.

In 1950 a group of prominent members of the Aruba community founded the Amateur Baseball Bond of Aruba (ABBA) to give structure to the management of the sport and became the organizers of official championship games. While maintaining the existing teams in a league that was referred to as A-class, ABBA established a B-class league in which the "Budweiser" and "Braves" played the first years.

By 1952 Aruba became a member of the International Amateur Baseball Association and fielded a team managed by Joe Proterra, (former pitcher of "Barnes' Ramblers"), that would play for the first time ever in the Amateur Baseball World Se-

ries that took place in Havana, Cuba in September. Surprisingly, Aruba won two of its six games and became the darling of the Havana fans. Nell Harms of the Aruban team was named the "Outstanding player of the week" for his performance against Honduras. He allowed just two hits, struck out 15 and hit the only homerun of the game. Joe Cambria, the famous scout for the Washington Senators offered him a contract, but Nel was not interested, but the next year, at the Amateur Baseball World Series in Caracas, Venezuela, Nel and Ruben Phillips did sign and in 1954 they played professional baseball the Georgia-Florida League and the Texas-New Mexico League. They were the first Arubans to play professionally, but not the only ones.

During the games in Havana, contacts were made with the organizers of Little League Baseball in Cuba which eventually resulted in the introduction of Little League in Aruba. Little League of Aruba has been extremely successful: It has produced many players who earned baseball scholarships at universities in the United States, a few who played professionally in the Netherlands and different countries in the Caribbean and five who reached the major leagues: Calvin Maduro, Eugene Kingsale, Radhames Dijkhoff, Sydney Ponson, and Xander Bogaerts one of the brightest stars of Boston Red Sox.

Written by Mr. Clyde Harms

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 38 Suppose

1 Dr's 40 Fencing
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22 Comes 23 Close

25 Superfruit 28 Power
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workers Indian
state

35 Turn 36 Spiels



Yesterday's answer

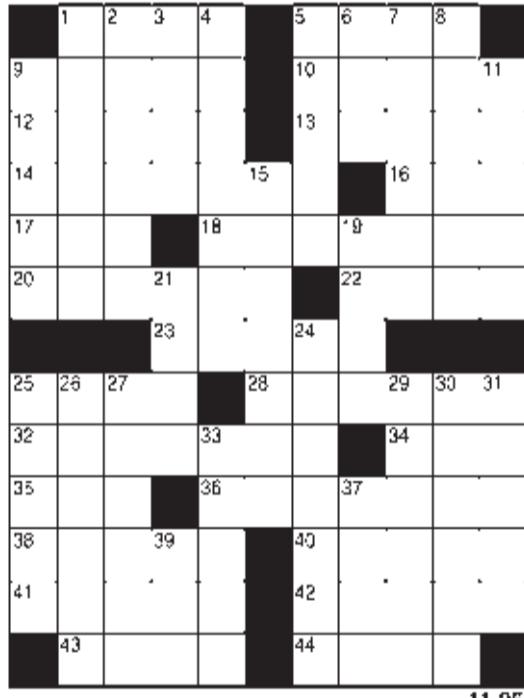
8 Danger 26 Confine

9 Mist 27 Duds

11 Full of 29 To-do
info list15 British 30 Ate
pop star greedily19 Final, e.g. 31 Moved
21 Hand or carefully

24 Cattle 33 Foils' kin

37 Air 39 Secretive

39 Secretive
govt. org.

11-25

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

11-25 CRYPTOQUOTE

VSX GZXTT YBBVLSR TYOM O

FYT YS VEXZSOIJR TLBBXTT

O RJVLIJR RJYR FYT RJX

WVSIXTR SOIJR OEX XEXZ

TGXR — TYSMZY BOTSXZVT

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: IT DIDN'T MATTER
HOW BIG OUR HOUSE WAS: IT MATTERED THAT
THERE WAS LOVE IN IT. — PETER RUFFETT

Putin to boost AI work in Russia to fight a Western monopoly he says is 'unacceptable and dangerous'

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday announced a plan to endorse a national strategy for the development of artificial intelligence, emphasizing that it's essential to prevent a Western monopoly.

Speaking at an AI conference in Moscow, Putin noted that "it's imperative to use Russian solutions in the field of creating reliable and transparent artificial intelligence systems that are also safe for humans." "Monopolistic dominance of such foreign technology in Russia is unacceptable, dangerous and inadmissible," Putin said.

He noted that "many modern systems, trained on Western data are intended for the Western market" and "reflect that part of Western ethics, norms of behavior, public policy to which we object."

During his more than two decades in power, Putin has overseen a multi-pronged crackdown on the opposition and civil society groups, and promoted "traditional values" to counter purported Western influence policies that have become even more oppressive after he sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022.

Putin warned that algorithms developed by Western platforms could lead to a digital "cancellation" of Russia and its culture.

"An artificial intelligence created in line with Western standards and patterns could be xenophobic," Putin said.

"Western search engines and generative models



Russian President Vladimir Putin, center, and Sberbank CEO German Gref, left, visit an exhibition on artificial intelligence in Moscow, Russia, Friday, Nov. 24, 2023. Putin takes part in the plenary session of the international conference on artificial intelligence and machine learning "Artificial Intelligence Journey 2023" on the topic "The Generative AI Revolution: New Opportunities."

(Mikhail Klimentyev, Sputnik, Kremlin Pool Photo via AP)

often work in a very selective, biased manner, do not take into account, and sometimes simply ignore and cancel Russian culture," he said. "Simply put, the machine is given some kind of creative task, and it solves it using only English-language data, which is convenient and beneficial to the system developers. And so an algorithm, for example, can indicate to a machine that Russia, our culture, science, music, literature simply do not exist."

He pledged to pour additional resources into the development of supercomputers and other technologies to help intensify national AI research.

"We are talking about expanding fundamental and applied research in the field of generative artificial intelligence and large language models," Putin said. "In the era of technologi-

cal revolution, it is the cultural and spiritual heritage that is the key factor in preserving national identity, and therefore the diversity of our world, and the stability of international relations," Putin said. "Our traditional values, the richness and beauty of the Russian languages and languages of other peoples of Russia must form the basis of our developments," helping create "reliable, transparent and secure AI systems." Putin emphasized that trying to ban AI development would be impossible, but noted the importance of ensuring necessary safeguards. "I am convinced that the future does not lie in bans on the development of technology, it is simply impossible," he said. "If we ban something, it will develop elsewhere, and we will only fall behind, that's all."

Putin added that the global community will be able to work out the security guidelines for AI once it fully realizes the risks.

"When they feel the threat of its uncontrolled spread, uncontrolled activities in this sphere, a desire to reach agreement will come immediately," he said. □

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French foreign minister says China's cooperation is vital in ending Russia-Ukraine war

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna said Friday that China's cooperation is vital on an issue that has divided it and much of Europe: ending the war in Ukraine. She encouraged China to continue working on its Ukrainian peace proposal while also ensuring that Chinese entities do not aid Russia in what she called "the ongoing war of aggression in Ukraine" phrasing the Chinese side would disagree with.

"France underlines once again how its cooperation with China is essential to promote a just and lasting peace," she said after talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. "We are counting on the vigilance of the Chinese authorities so that no structure in China, particularly private, contributes directly or indirectly to Russia's illegal war effort in Ukraine."

Her meetings in Beijing underscored an effort by both sides to continue a dialogue despite their growing differences, whether on the Ukraine war, the Israel-Hamas war or Europe's huge trade deficit with China. The talks in some ways foreshadowed an EU-China leaders meeting next month.

In a meeting with Chinese Premier Li Qiang earlier in the day, Colonna said their countries should work together to address issues such as climate change and biodiversity. A major U.N. climate conference starts next week in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

"As big powers, we both share the responsibility to tackle global challenges and we can make concerted efforts in alleviating tensions around the world," she said.

China has been critical of U.S. efforts to seek the help of its allies, including in Europe, in its competition with China over trade, technology and security. It has accused the U.S. of



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, right, shakes hands with French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing, Friday, Nov. 24, 2023.

(AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

building groupings to contain China's development and rise.

Wang warned against the politicizing of issues and protectionism. The European Union has been taking a tougher line on China, launching a trade investigation into subsidies given to Chinese electric vehicle makers.

"We believe that as long as China and Europe work together, there will be no confrontation between camps, no division of the world, and no new Cold War," Wang said.

The Chinese government has refrained from criticiz-

ing Russia's invasion or the Hamas attack that sparked its latest war with Israel, taking a different stance than many in Europe and the United States. It has accused the West of prolonging the European conflict by supplying arms to Ukraine and called for an end to the fighting in both wars.

Colonna said that dialogue with China on the Gaza situation, and even cooperation, would be useful. She called for the release of all the hostages, including eight French-Israeli citizens, three of whom are children.

"Every state has the right to defend itself, but we must cooperate so that terrorism is contained and so that what happened cannot happen again," she said. □

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Sean 'Diddy' Combs accused of sexual abuse by two more women

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Two more women have come forward to accuse Sean "Diddy" Combs of sexual abuse, one week after the music mogul settled a separate lawsuit with the singer Cassie that contained allegations of rape and physical abuse.

Both of the new suits were filed Thursday on the eve of the expiration of the Adult Survivors Act, a New York law permitting victims of sexual abuse a one-year window to file civil action regardless of the statute of limitations.

The filings detail acts of sexual assault, beatings and forced drugging allegedly committed in the early 1990s by Combs, then a talent director, party promoter and rising figure in New York City's hip-hop community.

One of the accusers, Joi Dickerson, said she was a 19-year-old student at Syracuse University when she agreed to meet Combs at a restaurant in Harlem in 1991. After their date, Combs "intentionally drugged" her, then brought her home and sexually assaulted her, according to the filing.

Without her knowledge, Combs videotaped the assault and later shared it with several friends in the music industry, the suit alleges. The public exposure sent Dickerson into a "tailspin,"



FILE - Music mogul and entrepreneur Sean "Diddy" Combs arrives at the Billboard Music Awards in Las Vegas, May 15, 2022. Two more women have come forward to accuse Combs of sexual abuse, one week after the music mogul settled a separate lawsuit with the singer Cassie that contained allegations of rape and physical abuse. Both of the new suits were filed Thursday, Nov. 24, 2023.

(Photo by Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP, File)

contributing to severe depression that landed her in the hospital and forced her to drop out of college. In a separate lawsuit filed Thursday, an unnamed woman accused Combs and an R&B singer, Aaron Hall, of sexually assaulting her and a friend, then beating her several days later. The woman identified only as Jane Doe said that she and her roommate returned to Hall's home with him and Combs after a music industry event in 1990 or 1991. The accuser said she was coerced into having sex with Combs. Af-

terward, as she was getting dressed, "Hall barged into the room, pinned her down and forced Jane Doe to have sex with him," the suit states.

When the victim later spoke to her friend, who is also not named, she learned that her friend "had been forced to have sex with Combs and Hall in another room," according to the suit. "Upon information and belief, when Combs finished with Jane Doe, he and Hall switched, and they commenced assaulting Jane Doe's friend," the suit states.

A few days later, an "irate" Combs allegedly showed up at the home of the two women in an attempt to stop them from speaking out about the abuse. He then choked the woman identified as Jane Doe until she passed out, the suit states. In an emailed statement, a spokesperson for Combs denied the allegations, accusing the two women of seeking to exploit the New York law that temporarily extended the statute of limitations.

An email inquiry to Hall was not returned.

Tyrone Blackburn, an at-

torney for the unnamed accuser, said his client was in the process of securing medical documents and witness statements to support her suit, which was filed late Thursday "in an effort to preserve the statute of limitations."

The suit brought by Dickerson notes that the victim filed police reports in New York and New Jersey after the abuse. Inquiries to the New York City Police Department were not immediately returned. It was not clear which other jurisdictions the reports may have been filed.

After the filmed assault, Dickerson said she approached friends in the music industry asking them to confirm the existence of the "revenge porn" tape, but was rebuffed by those who were "terrified that Combs would retaliate against them and that they would lose future business and music opportunities."

The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they have been sexually abused unless they come forward publicly, as Dickerson has done.

In years after the alleged assaults, Combs, now 54, would found his own label, Bad Boys Records, helping to produce Mary J. Blige and Biggie Smalls on his way to becoming one of the most influential hip-hop producers and executives in the genre's history. □

Paris Hilton announces the arrival of a baby daughter, London



Paris Hilton poses at GQ's Men of the Year Party at Bar Marmont, Thursday, Nov. 16, 2023, in Los Angeles.

(AP Photo/Chris Pizzello)

By The Associated Press undefined

Paris Hilton had a Thanksgiving surprise to share: a daughter named London. Hilton on Friday shared an Instagram photo of a pink baby outfit with "London" printed on the top.

"Thankful for my baby girl," read the caption.

She followed with several Thanksgiving TikToks that further demystified the new arrival, including one in which she and husband Carter Reum chant "big brother" to their baby son Phoenix. London was welcomed via surrogate, Hilton's representative confirmed to The Associated Press on Friday.

Hilton has been open about her journey to motherhood, freezing eggs and surrogacy. On her podcast earlier this year, Hilton had said that she was excited for Phoenix to have a baby sister named London.

"It's my favorite city and I've always wanted to name my daughter London," Hilton said at the time. "I had actually picked that name for a long time now, probably over 10 years. I always wanted London. I love that name for my daughter."

Hilton and Reum announced the arrival of Phoenix, also via surrogate, in January. The couple married in a lavish ceremony in November 2021. □

Australia beats Finland 2-0 to reach 2nd straight Davis Cup final

MALAGA, Spain (AP)— Alex de Miñaur and Alexei Popyrin put Australia back into the Davis Cup final for a second straight year after winning their singles matches in a 2-0 victory over Finland on Friday.

Popyrin gave Australia a 1-0 lead in the semifinal match after beating Otto Virtanen 7-6 (5), 6-2. De Miñaur then finished off Finland by beating Emil Ruusuvuori 6-4, 6-3.

Novak Djokovic's Serbia will face Jannik Sinner's Italy on Saturday in the other semifinal match on the indoor hard court at Martin Carpena arena in Malaga, Spain.

Popyrin edged Virtanen in the first set, saving a set point when trailing 6-5 and forcing a tiebreaker that he clinched when his opponent slapped a forehand long.

Virtanen was Finland's hero in its upset of defending champion Canada on Tuesday, winning both his singles and doubles matches. But his serve let him down against Popyrin in the second set when his fifth double-fault cost him a break.

"(That was) probably the biggest win of my career so far," Popyrin said. "To win a match that means so much for us is an honor and something I will never forget."

De Miñaur converted five of 18 break chances against Ruusuvuori. He ended the match by landing a backhand winner on the sideline.

Lleyton Hewitt's Australia is seeking a second consecutive final. Australia has the second-most Davis Cup titles, with 28 to 32 for the United States, but its last success came in 2003. □



Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori, left, congratulates with Australia's Alex de Minaur at the end of their Davis Cup semi-final tennis match between Finland and Australia in Malaga, Spain, Friday, Nov. 24, 2023.

(AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)

South African Olympic runner Oscar Pistorius granted parole, will be released from prison on Jan. 5

By GERALD IMRAY and MOGOMOTSI MAGOME Associated Press

PRETORIA, South Africa (AP)

— Double-amputee Olympic runner Oscar Pistorius was granted parole on Friday, more than a decade after shooting his girlfriend through a toilet door at his home in South Africa in a killing that jolted the world. He will be released from prison on Jan. 5, but will be constantly monitored by parole officials for five years until his sentence expires, the Department of Corrections said. Pistorius' parole will come with other conditions, Department of Corrections spokesman Singabakho Nxumalo said outside of the prison where Pistorius has been incarcerated in the South African capital, Pretoria, for killing Reeva Steenkamp.

Pistorius won't be allowed to leave the area of Pretoria where he is set to live without permission from authorities. He will also attend a program to deal with anger issues and another pro-

gram on violence against women. He will have to perform community service.

"Parole does not mean the end of the sentence. It is still part of the sentence. It only means the inmate will complete the sentence outside a correctional facility," Nxumalo said. "What will happen is that Mr. Pistorius will

be allocated a monitoring official. This official will work with him until his sentence expires." Nxumalo said the monitoring official would need to be notified of any major events in Pistorius' life, including if he wants to move to another home or get a job.

"We have to be informed

of each and every activity," Nxumalo said.

Pistorius won't wear a monitoring bracelet as that is not part of South African parole procedure, Nxumalo said. Pistorius' sentence will expire on Dec. 5, 2029.

The decision to grant parole was made at a hearing at the prison earlier Friday. Pistorius, who turned 37 this week, has been in jail since late 2014 for the Valentine's Day 2013 killing of model Steenkamp, although he was released for a period of house arrest in 2015 while one of the numerous appeals in his case was heard. He was ultimately convicted of murder and sentenced to 13 years and five months in prison.

Serious offenders in South Africa must serve at least half of their sentence to be eligible for parole, which Pistorius has done.

Pistorius was at the height of his fame and one of the world's most admired athletes when he killed Steenkamp. He shot her multiple times in the bathroom of his

Pretoria villa in the predawn hours with his licensed 9mm pistol. Pistorius' parole hearing was his second in the space of eight months. He was wrongly ruled ineligible for early release at a first hearing in March. That was due to an error made by an appeals court over when the sentence officially started.

Pistorius was initially convicted of culpable homicide a charge comparable to manslaughter for killing Steenkamp. That conviction was overturned and he was convicted of murder after an appeal by prosecutors.

They also appealed against an initial sentence of six years for murder, and Pistorius was ultimately sentenced to 13 years and five months in prison.

Pistorius testified at his murder trial that he killed Steenkamp by mistake when he fired four times through the door thinking she was a dangerous intruder hiding in his bathroom in the middle of the night. □



FILE - Oscar Pistorius leaves the High Court in Pretoria, South Africa, Wednesday, June 15, 2016, after his sentencing proceedings. Pistorius could be granted parole on Friday, Nov. 24, 2023 after nearly 10 years in prison for killing his girlfriend. The double-amputee Olympic runner was convicted of a charge comparable to third-degree murder for shooting Reeva Steenkamp in his home in 2013. He has been in prison since late 2014.

(AP Photo/Themba Hadebe, File)

Weekly SPECIALS



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Chorizo Sausage	BBQ/Grill Porkloin Chops	Angus Entrecanto	Asparagus STD				

WAS \$10.83	\$9.42 Each	WAS \$7.31	\$5.99 Per BAG	WAS \$4.85	\$3.97 Per KG	WAS \$3.40	\$2.83 Each	éxito Ekono Pasta Macarron 400g	\$1.59 Each
Grapes Bi Color Seedless 2lb	Apples Golden Delicious 3lbs	Mandarin/Tangerine	Onions Yellow Medium 3lbs	Ekono Pasta Macarron 400g					

DIARY/FROZEN

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Nestle Coffee Mate French Vanilla Creamer 32oz	
WAS \$4.85	\$3.65 Each
EE American Singles 16ct	

HBC/GM

WAS \$1.88	\$1.59 Each
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WAS \$17.71	\$15.42 Each
Brawny Full Sheet Paper Towels 4 Double Rolls-8	

DELI/BAKERY

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Gerookte Onbijtspek	
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EE Cranberry Juice Cocktail 64fz	
WAS \$1.48	\$1.31 Each
Gwoon Groen Olijven Zonder Pit 220gr	
WAS \$1.96	\$1.71 Each
Goodburry Corn Flakes 375gr	
WAS \$1.77	\$1.59 Each
Melkan Halfvolle Melk Houdbare 1lt	
éxito Frescampo Lentil 1000g	\$3.42 Each

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